

Remarkable new London-to-London stamp discovery turns up more examples

CHARLES J.G. VERGE

The green and yellow London-to-London semiofficial air post stamp is an exceptional rarity of Canadian aerophilately, and now a previously unrecorded copy of this scarce stamp has come to light. Quietly kept safe for more than 40 years by the family of a prominent collector, it was certified as genuine in April of this year.

A souvenir of a doomed 1927 trans-Atlantic mail flight attempt — from London, Ontario, to London, England — the stamp is not listed in the Scott catalog because of its “semiofficial” nature. In the 2006 *Unitrade Specialized Catalogue of Canadian Stamps* it appears under the heading Air Post Semi-Officials, identified with catalog number CLP6 and assigned a value of \$50,000 (Canadian) unused.

When I first began writing this article I held the belief, based on existing research, that there were four known and recorded unused London-to-London semiofficial air post stamps.

I originally intended to open with this statement: “There has been an increase of 25 percent in the known number of Canada’s rarest unused semiofficial stamp with the discovery, earlier this year, of a fifth example. The Vincent Graves Greene Philatelic Research Foundation’s Expert Committee (Greene Foundation) gave the new discovery the green light when it issued certificate 13719 in April last.”

But as I began researching the stamp, one article I read started me off on an extensive investigation that eventually identified a total of nine unused copies, including the new 2006 discovery

(which is pictured in Figure 1).

In the Literature Notes column of the July 2004 issue (No. 8) of the *New CartoPhilatelist* (the quarterly journal of the CartoPhilatelic Society), Miklos Pinter wrote of the London-to-London stamp that “a mint copy of this semi-official label may also be found in the Allan Lee Collection of the National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C.” However, after an exchange of e-mails with Wilson Hulme, the philatelic curator of the NPM, I learned that the Lee Collection includes a reproduction of the stamp, not an original.

As a follow-up, I contacted representatives of the British Postal Museum, the British Library, and the Royal Philatelic Collection, and in the process I discovered the existence of two examples of the London-to-London stamp in the British Library.

Also, two new examples were found by perusing the auction catalogs at the Greene Foundation and the American Philatelic Research Library. A 10th copy of the stamp exists used on cover (Figure 2).

Of the nine unused stamps, six are in private hands, two are in the British Library’s philatelic collection, and the new “Geldert” copy will be auctioned by Shreves Philatelic Galleries in September.

THE NEW DISCOVERY

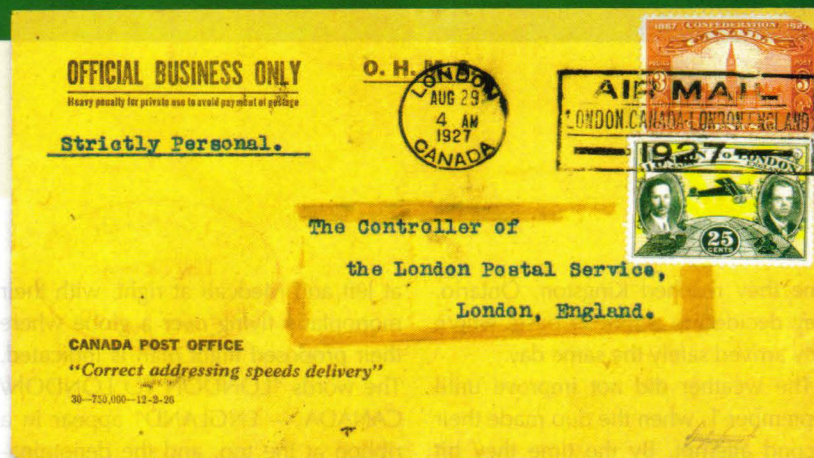
For more than 40 years, the new discovery has been in the possession of one of the daughters of the legendary Mac Geldert, president of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada from 1959 until his death in 1967. Her father gave the stamp to her and her husband several years before he died. Geldert formed many collections of classic Canada but was not known for an interest in airmails.

It has been at least 20 years, but likely more than that, since the last discovery of London-to-London stamps has been reported. Records of three of the existing stamps were not made until 1986. For most of the stamps, there are no records of the dates of first ownership or when they were first put on sale, but there is published corroboration indicating philatelic writers knew of three



Figure 1. A previously unrecorded copy of the London-to-London semiofficial air post stamp was publicly revealed earlier this year. It is now known as the “Geldert” copy (Copy 9).

Figure 2. The unique London-to-London cover. It is presumed that all other remaining covers perished with the lost plane.
Courtesy of Harmers of London.



copies by 1935, and a fourth by 1952.

In a September 1, 1967, article on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the flight, *The London Free Press* reported "only five or six of the original stamps remain." However, it now seems likely that different stamps were counted as the same stamp at different times.

The airmail flights of the early 20th century included attempts to bridge the "great divide" of the Atlantic Ocean; one such attempt was the ill-fated London-to-London flight of 1927. But until now, little effort has been made to document the extent of the London-to-London philatelic material that exists on either side of that "great divide."

When reporting on the stamps, North American writers repeated the "three to four known" mantra as late as the auction catalogs of the late-20th and early 21st century while, at the same time, British writers claimed that there were three stamps known, of which two were in the British Library.

The October 2004 *FISA Bulletin* reproduced an earlier claim that a block of four stamps was given to each of the flyer's widows and, of the remaining two stamps, one was in the British Postal Museum and one was unaccounted for. This claim had been disputed by the time it was reprinted, with reports that the widows received none of the stamps, the British Postal Museum had

none and that there were at least four others known (at the time).

The story of these stamps, and the flight they were issued for, is nothing short of fascinating.

THE FATEFUL FLIGHT

The London-to-London flight, a name given to it by philatelists, was officially known as the Sir John Carling flight, after the name bestowed upon the aircraft used in the attempt.

Arthur C. Carty, a young freelance newspaperman for the *London Advertiser*, conceived the idea of such a flight. The exploits of American pilot Charles A. Lindbergh and other famous aviators of the mid-1920s had given rise to Carty's interest in aviation.

Charles Burns, Marco Leon and Harry Low — the owners of Carling Breweries of London, Ontario — decided to sponsor an aviation competition as a publicity project. The Carling firm announced that a \$25,000 prize would be paid to an aviator completing a nonstop flight from London, Ontario, to London, England. The aviator had to complete the 3,900-mile trek in his own plane.

When it was discovered that only one of the applicants could afford his own plane, the rules of the competition were revised: Carling Breweries would furnish the best plane and equipment available, and select a Canadian or

British pilot for the flight. If successful, they would receive the \$25,000 prize. One stop would be allowed.

The selection of the pilot who stood the best chance was left to a secret committee, and Captain Terrence B. Tully and Lieutenant James Medcalf were chosen from a list of 80 applicants. Both Tully and Medcalf flew planes looking out for forest fires for the Ontario Forestry Patrol of the Ontario Fire Prevention Service. The plane chosen by the technical committee was a Stinson SM-1 Detroitier with a Wright Whirlwind engine, as no Canadian planes or motors were available, and British aviation manufacturers could not provide an aircraft for more than a year.

The attempt was supported by the City of London (for runway construction), the governments of Canada and the United States, the steamship companies (reporting meteorological and environmental conditions) and the Canadian Post Office (for mail service).

The plane was christened the *Sir John Carling* on August 12, 1927, by Leonard Carling, Sir John's great-grandson (Figure 3). After the christening ceremony, Mayor John Mackenzie Moore of London, Ontario, swore in Tully and Medcalf as official mail carriers.

A crowd of more than 25,000 people saw the plane take off on August 29. The weather turned on the pilots and by the

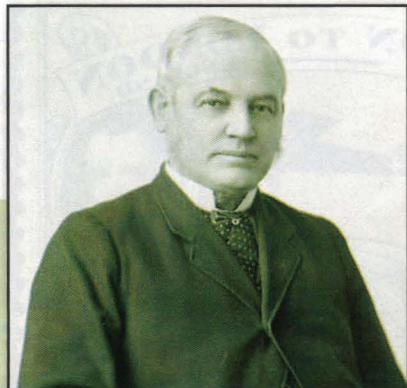


Figure 3. Sir John Carling, after whom the London-to-London plane was named.

Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada.

time they reached Kingston, Ontario, they decided to return to base, where they arrived safely the same day.

The weather did not improve until September 1, when the duo made their second attempt. By the time they hit Caribou, Maine, the fog had rolled in and they had to land.

On September 5, they made their way to St. John's, Newfoundland, and on the 7th they left for the Atlantic crossing with 300 gallons of fuel and extra oil, and the mail they had carried from London, Ontario.

Even though the weather for the day had been described as "good and favorable," the *Sir John Carling* disappeared somewhere over the Atlantic. No wreckage was ever found.

THE SEMIOFFICIAL STAMP

The perf 12 green and yellow stamp was printed by lithography on white wove paper in London, Ontario, by the firm of Lawson and Jones, under the supervision of a Post Office inspector sent from Ottawa.

The Post Office approved printing of the stamp on August 18, 1927. The stamp colors matched the green and gold colors of the airplane.

Only 100 stamps were printed. There is some controversy about whether they were printed in 25 sheets of four, or on a single sheet of 100. The stamps were closely monitored and controlled, and were available only to those closely connected to the flight. Most of the stamps were used on the mail. How many were used on flight covers is still a subject of discussion.

The design showed the busts of Tully

at left and Medcalf at right, with their monoplane flying over a globe where their proposed flight plan is indicated. The words "LONDON TO LONDON/CANADA — ENGLAND" appear in a ribbon at the top, and the denomination "25 CENTS" is inscribed in a circle at the bottom. The 25¢ denomination is misleading, because those interested in sending mail on the flight had to pay \$25 per cover to do so.

Post Office officials destroyed the printing stone after printing was completed. It is believed that 10 copies of the stamps — some writers have called them proofs — were sent to Ottawa to be put on Official mail from the governor general and the prime minister to King George V and other senior British government officials.

Major Richard K. Malott, Canada's pre-eminent aerophilatelist, is of the opinion that the stamps were printed in panes of four. There is no documented proof of this, but supporting his theory is the fact that some stamps have excellent centering, while for others the centering is poor. If the stamps had been printed in a sheet of 100, it seems likely they would have more uniform centering.

Furthermore, if the plate had 100 impressions it would have been easy to make more than one sheet and supply stamps to more collectors. Finally, there are shade differences between existing examples of the stamps that could be caused by different pressure being applied during the process

of printing different sheets of four.

Until documentation is found, there is no reason to believe that the stamps would have been printed in a sheet of 100 or even two sheets of 50 subjects.

Four unused copies of the stamp were identified by Robert W. Marcello in "London to London Update" in the January-February 1988 issue of the *Newsletter of the Canadian Semi-Official Air Mail Study Group* (CSOAMSG). Marcello lists the stamps he knew about at the time of writing, explains their differences, and identifies each by a capital letter.

In light of the more-than-doubling of the numbers recorded with this report, I have decided to list the known stamps by date as they first appeared in the literature or at auction houses. Where appropriate, I have listed Marcello's corresponding capital letter beside my number.

The following list is based on Marcello's descriptions and augmented by other details gleaned from information published since 1988, and from additional sources.

Copy 1: Pictured as an illustration in the Sanabria airmail catalogs of 1940, 1947, 1950 and 1954-55. From 1956 forward, the Sanabria catalog editors used a proof-like illustration with no perforations. The *Unitrade Specialized Catalogue of Canadian Stamps* used this illustration as well from at least 1987 to



Figure 4. The copy of the London-to-London semiofficial stamp (Copy 8) owned by Chris Carmichael of Vance Auctions, and illustrated here with his permission.

2006. Robin Harris, the catalog's editor, says he will use Copy 8 (Marcello D) as his illustration in the 2007 edition of the catalog. Copy 1 is badly centered to the bottom and the right. It once belonged to a collector named Shradly and was to have been sold by H.R. Harmer in fall 1966 when the Shradly Collection was put up for sale. However, it was withdrawn and sold privately before the sale took place. It next appeared in the April 19, 1972, John C. Cornelius sale by J.N. Sissons. No other reference to it has been located.

Copy 2 (Marcello B): This is probably the premium mint copy in private hands, as it comes from the upper right corner of the sheet and still has the margins attached. It was first illustrated in a 1952 article by L. Seale Holmes in the October 4, 1952, *Weekly Philatelic Gossip* (though the image is cropped close and the margins are not visible). This article was repeated in many editions of *Holmes Handbook and Catalogue of Canada and B.N.A.*, until the last edition was published in 1968. It sold in an October 22, 1969, J. N. Sissons sale for \$3,750, and sold again by the same firm in the Cornelius sale of October 6, 1971, bringing only \$2,700. It has not been seen since, except for a little foray in the Court of Honor at CAPEX 87 and as illustrations in *Maple Leaves* (Autumn 1990) and the *Canadian Aerophilatelic Society Bulletin* (Vol. XV, No. 3, 1999).

Copy 3: This is the first example to have been sold at auction. The stamp is centered slightly to the bottom left, with part original gum. It has a few short perforations and one missing at the bottom. F.W. Kessler of New York offered it

for \$5,250 (U.S.) when the firm sold the Matthews Collection of Airmail Stamps, Part I, on October 25, 1960. It later sold on March 11, 1986, through the Pegasus Collection of Airmails of the World sale by Harmers of London for £6,325 (approximately \$9,130 [U.S.] at the time). It was sold again by Harmers of London in the Joseph Bergier collection on April 6, 2004, along with the unique cover shown in Figure 2, and was described as with "o.g." (original gum). Together, the stamp and cover realized a whopping £70,575 (approximately \$129,250 [U.S.] at the time).

Copy 4: This copy and Copy 5 are the two examples currently housed in the philatelic collections of the British Library. They are part of the Mrs. Augustine Fitzgerald Collection donated to the library in 1947, one of the most spectacular collection of airmail stamps, covers and supporting documents ever put together. Copy 3 is a left margin copy with original gum. It is well centered with some split perforations.

Copy 5: From the Fitzgerald Collection of the British Library. This is a lower left corner copy with both margins and original gum. It is centered slightly to the lower left. It is illustrated in at least in three different books or articles printed in Great Britain.

Copy 6 (Marcello C): Another unused copy but without gum, and it has some soiling and a tear. It is centered to the bottom right and the tear is at the bottom. It was sold by Sissons on

January 14, 1986, (from the Jack Myers collection) but was quickly consigned to a dealer who offered it at his booth during CAPEX 87. He sold it for \$6,950 during the show. On June 8, 1991, it was sold through Ron Leith Auctions for \$9,000.

Copy 7 (Marcello E): The only recorded mention of this copy is in the June 25-26, 1986, sale at Cherrystone auction. The description gives no information on condition except to say "fine." It was hammered down at US \$20,000. It is illustrated in the CSOAMSG newsletter article on page 3.

Copy 8 (Marcello D): The September 4, 1986, Maresch sale description for this stamp reads, "trifle gum missing at top, otherwise full o.g. and n.h. with vertical crease, otherwise VF." The centering is very slightly to the right. It sold for \$8,000. It is currently owned by Chris Carmichael of Vance Auctions, who has it available for sale. He purchased it from Cherrystone Auctions in their November 2-3, 2005, sale for \$25,300 (U.S.) and it was displayed at the Vance Auctions booth at AmeriStamp Expo in Toronto, April 7-9, 2006. It is also illustrated on the web site of the Canadian Postal Museum (Figure 4).

Copy 9: The "Geldert" copy in Figure 1, found in 2006 and offered for sale for the first time by Shreves Auction

Figure 6. One of the many reproductions of the London-to-London stamp.
Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution's National Postal Museum.



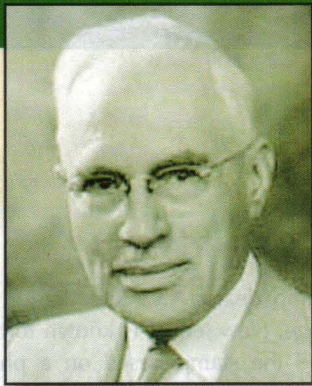


Figure 5. L. Seale Holmes, a London medical practitioner, civic leader and stamp dealer. He was likely responsible for the removal of the unique cover from the flight.

Galleries in September 2006. It is without gum, has some soiling and a thin on the reverse.

THE SURVIVING COVER

As noted previously, only one example of the London-to-London stamp is known on cover: All others were presumably lost when the *Sir John Carling* disappeared over the Atlantic Ocean. It is believed that the cover was carried on the first flight to Kingston, but was overlooked or removed from the bag when the plane returned to London, and before the mail was canceled a second time by a September 1 machine cancel. The canceling machine used was the same as the one used August 29. The slogan machine cancel is also known with an August 19 date.

R. Brian Holmes first showed the unique cover at FIPEX in 1956. It had been in the owner's family for some time, possibly since 1927, as he inherited it from his father, L. Seale Holmes (Figure 5), a well-known collector and stamp dealer in London, Ontario. As a prominent politician and doctor in London, Ontario, Holmes may have been in a position to ensure that this philatelic souvenir was preserved.

It was first recorded sold at Sissons in their October 6, 1969, sale for \$4,750 and again in 1971 in the Cornelius sale

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If you have followed our advertisements and pricelists over the years you are aware that Canadian plate proofs have long been a specialty of ours. And why not! The proofs produced by the American Bank Note Company from the 1890's to the 1920's are among the most beautiful ever printed. The outstanding engraved designs of the stamps are truly exceptional, and a nice proof set makes a wonderful addition to any collection of Canadian stamps. Here's a case in point:

The Leaf Issue of Canada appeared in 1897. It is comprised of eight values with a common design (Scott #66-73). This attractive issue was short-lived for an interesting reason. Soon after its release non-English speaking Canadians began to complain about it. They could not read the face values of the stamps as they were shown in English only! The Government quickly acknowledged the problem and approved a new issue including numerals in the corners of the design.

When the archives of the American Bank Note Company were sold in 1990, some plate proofs of the Leaf Issue were included. They were all contained in a single lot. Although estimated for as little as \$35,000, competition for the lot was fierce and it was finally hammered down for a staggering \$88,000 U.S., surprising everyone in attendance.

How many sets of Leaf Issue plate proofs exist? They are truly scarce. A few could be found in collections before the Bank Note sale, but they were in very poor condition. The 8¢ orange is the key value and therefore limits the number of complete sets that can be put together. There were only 172 examples of the 8¢ in the American Bank Note Auction, and many of these were faulty. That leaves less than 150 very fine sets in all. Unlike the proofs that had been on the market previously, those in the ABN Archives were as fresh as the day they were made. They are printed on card mounted india paper, showing deeply engraved impressions and rich vivid colours.

I feel that current price levels for the Leaf Issue proofs leave a great deal of room for future appreciation. If you compare the available quantity with prices and quantities for other issues you will see what I mean. Check for instance the price for a set of the 1897 Diamond Jubilee Issue proofs of which some 300 sets exist. I can supply a complete set of the Leaf Issue proofs in very fine condition at just **\$1,295.00**. Terms are available if required, say ten payments of \$129.50 each. If you prefer pairs or blocks of four, these are also available pro-rata. Contact me today to reserve your set.

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by the same firm for \$3,500. It is at this time that tape covering the address was removed. It was displayed in the Courts of Honor at INTERPHIL 76 and CAPEX 78 before being sold in November 1979, again by Sissons, in the Ed Richardson sale of Canadian airmails. Bids opened at \$9,500 and the cover was sold to the floor for \$30,000.

Charles Firby Auctions sold it on April 30, 1995, for \$40,000, as part of the Sam C. Nickle collection of Canadian airmails; the buyer was Joseph Bergier. Harmers of London sold it with Bergier's airmail collection in 2004, and its current whereabouts are unknown.

How many covers were carried on the plane? Some earlier estimates can now be discounted, such as the 97 mentioned by N.A. Pelletier (*BNA Topics*, 1959) and Hugh Halliday (undated monograph prior to 1974, but published that year in *BNA Topics*) or the 95 found in Stan Shantz and Don Demaray's *Philately in London* published in 1967.

At the other end of the spectrum is Walter Plomish's assertion that only 42 covers were carried (*The Canadian Aerophilatelist*, March 1995, Vol. XI, No. 1). He based his claim on an August 31, 1927, letter from the postmaster at London, Ontario, to the postmaster general stating, "The dispatch consists of 42 fully prepaid items for all London, England and points in the British Isles."

This information, coming from official sources, should be credible, except for two salient pieces of information

missing in the equation. The first is the statement "fully prepaid," which does not take into consideration official letters on government business that were mailed with a free frank but bearing the semiofficial airmail label — over which the postmaster had no control.

The surviving cover clearly shows that the Imperial rate of 3¢ per ounce was also required. Only those prepaying the Imperial rate would have been counted by the postmaster as "fully prepaid".

The other reason there likely were more covers would be that more mint or unused stamps would exist if the number of flown covers was small. The way the stamps were carefully parceled out would mitigate for a much larger survival rate if they had not been used.

THE REAL AND THE FAKE

In 1963, Ed Richardson states in his Hollow Tree column in *The Canadian Philatelist* (September-October 1963, Vol. XIV, No. 5), "since the location of all copies of this rarity is well known to specialists, the only copies that anyone is apt to come across, are fakes."

Many reproductions have been made and are of very poor quality and mostly in the wrong colors (Figure 6). Others have been manufactured in association with philatelic shows (Figure 7).

In the same column, Richardson indicated that one could easily distinguish original stamps from the fakes. The original has a thin outer frame line and a thicker inside one, and the lower outside frame line is not broken. The fakes show the same thickness in both frame lines and there are breaks in the upper and lower outside frame lines.

Stamp dealer A.C. Roessler of East Orange, New Jersey, is known to have forged the stamp based on a photograph he acquired, with the colors of his forgery being completely wrong. His request to participate on the flight had been refused by the organizers: He had wished to send several hundred envelopes, but the organizers felt that the less weight the plane carried, the better its chances of success.

In the end, Lloyd's of London paid \$8,500 to each widow based on a verbal agreement for a \$10,000 insurance policy, although the premiums had never been paid. Lloyd's deducted the premiums before paying out.

Carling Breweries provided the prize money and the total allowed for a trust fund to be set up for Mrs. Tully and Mrs. Medcalf and their three children. Rumor had it that some of the stamps were given to the widows. Later in life, Mrs. Tully disputed this fact. Finally, on January 15, 1928, the Canadian Government's Department of the Interior named two lakes in Northwestern Ontario for the two intrepid flyers. This was reported in the February 6, 1928, edition of *The Stamp Herald* (Vol. XIII, No. 10, p. 206).

I would like to thank the following people for their help in making this article possible: David Beech, British Library; Ellen Peachy, American Philatelic Research Library; Wilson Hulme, National Postal Museum, Washington, D.C.; Michael Sefi, Keeper, the Royal Philatelic Collection; Douglas Muir, British Postal Museum; Chris Carmichael, Vance Auctions; Ray Simrak; Chris Hargreaves; and Richard K. Malott, FRPSC. ■

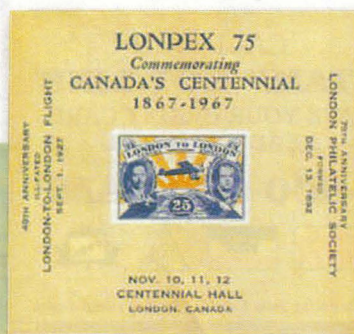


Figure 7. A reproduction of the London-to-London stamp prepared for the LONPEX 75 stamp show.